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TAGS: [CM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: UN OFFICIAL SEEKS USG SUPPORT TO PRESSURE
PRESIDENT BIYA

REF: YAOUNDE 1479

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Scott Ticknor

¶1. (C) Summary: The Director of the Africa Division, UN Department of Political Affairs, Sammy Kum Buo (of Cameroonian origin), recently encouraged Ambassador to help convince A/S Jendayi Frazer and former UNSG Kofi Annan to engage President Biya about the need to plan for succession when his term ends in 2011. We believe such interventions could be useful as Cameroon debates constitutional reform and enters the critical next few years. End summary.

¶2. (C) In a December 18 courtesy call on Ambassador, Sammy Kum Buo, Director of the Africa Division, Department of Political Affairs, UN New York, hoped the USG could intervene to help convince President Biya to step down after his term is due to expire in 2011. Buo (of Cameroonian origin) said Cameroon is among the handful of African countries his UN office is watching closely for how they manage political transition. He was concerned about the lack of succession planning and the recent calls by the ruling CPDM party and senior officials to remove term limits by changing the constitution (reftel). Buo opined that "some powerful people" believe that if Biya tries to stay on, "it will be civil war."

¶3. (C) According to Buo, President Biya is not power hungry; however, he is weak and isolated, surrounded by a weak Prime Minister and President of the National Assembly, and timid, corrupt ministers. Biya needs to downsize his Cabinet, decentralize power, and recover at least some of the stolen wealth from those around him, Buo argued. The President needs to be helped to transition out of power, he concluded.

¶4. (C) Buo opined that Biya has high regard for A/S Jendayi Frazer and would listen to her in thinking through succession options. Buo also sought USG support in engaging former UNSG Kofi Annan, whom Biya reportedly greatly respects. Buo hoped Annan could play an instrumental role in dissuading Biya to tamper with term limits and in persuading him to prepare for succession. Buo said that "empathy works, preaching doesn't" and he hoped that Frazer and Annan could appeal to Biya's legacy. Buo said the UN could not get involved directly but he would also approach the British on this issue and possibly other governments (although not the French - he argued that Biya does not trust France).

¶5. (C) Comment: Buo did not claim to speak for the United Nations but appeared to reflect internal discussions in his office and some of his own personal concerns as a savvy

Cameroonian dealing with conflicts and political problems throughout the continent. We share Buo's concerns about the lack of succession planning and the prospect of Biya changing the constitution to stay in power. We also see scope for convincing Biya to take the democratic path. We believe it could be constructive for A/S Frazer and Annan to deliver a message to Biya early in the new year, the thrust of which would be: it's time to prepare to step down. End comment.

GARVEY